REFLECTIONS

ON THE PRESENT

High Price of Proviſions;

AND

The COMPLAINTS and DISTURBANCES ariſing therefrom.

People not perceiving a Scarcity, are apt to be jealous one of another; each ſuſpecting another's inequality of gain to rob him of his ſhare, every one will be employing his ſkill and power, the beſt he can, to procure to himſelf the ſame plenty as formerly.—This is but ſcrambling amongſt ourſelves, and helps no more againſt our want, than the ſtruggling for a ſhort coverlet, by thoſe who lie together, till it is pulled to pieces, will preſerve them from the cold.—The labourer's ſhare being ſeldom more than a bare ſubſiſtence, never allows that body of men time or opportunity to raiſe their thoughts above that, or to conteſt with the richer for theirs;—unleſs when ſome uncommon and great diſtreſs, uniting them in one univerſal ferment, makes them forget reſpect, and emboldens them to carve to their wants with armed force; and then ſometimes they break in upon the rich, and ſweep all like a deluge. But this rarely happens, but in the MAL-ADMINISTRATION OF NEGLECTED OR MISMANAGED GOVERNMENT.

Locke on Money, Intereſt, Trade, &c. page 115.

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REFLECTIONS, &c.

THE wiſdom of many modern governments has been exerciſed in laying open trade and encouraging agriculture, thereby providing, in the moſt effectual manner, for the proper ſupply of proviſions; for, on the experience of the paſt and preſent times, it appears, that after ſufficient laws are framed againſt frauds and deceits, the buyers and ſellers may be left to ſettle the prices of all things between themſelves. According to the maxim of Seneca, "No matter what the price "is, ſo the buyer and ſeller agree upon it;" the magiſtrate has no occaſion to interfere; for the nature of trade requires that both the contracting parties ſhould look about them, if they would not be deceived.

The induſtrious huſbandman will not fail to improve his lands when the advantage thereof accrues to himſelf, and he is at liberty to reſort to any market where he can get moſt money, and to ſell or keep the produce of his lands, agreeable to his own humour or intereſt: for he knows, as well as the trader, that in determining a price, the ſupply and the demand are

proportioned to each other; that unleſs there be an inequality, the buyers cannot ſink, nor the ſellers raiſe prices. It is the intereſt of both to attend exactly to this point, and they are equally checks on each other. "The prince or magi-"ſtrate (as the baron De Monteſquieu ob-"ſerves *) can no more aſcertain the value of "merchandizes, than he can eſtabliſh by a de-"cree, that the relation one has to ten is equal "to that of one to twenty. Julian's lowering "the price of proviſions at Antioch was the "cauſe of a terrible famine."

All traders have reciprocal wants, and they barter with each other only in proportion to their wants; it is therefore a true maxim, that no one ſhould be excluded from trading with another, except for very good reaſons, ſuch as the prohibition of exportation, to prevent a temporary ſcarcity; but a perpetual prohibition would deprive the induſtrious huſbandman and the manufacturer from the privilege of procuring the intrinſic value of their commodity, or that natural price which would be fixed on it, if it had a fair chance to be exchanged for any other commodity, or for money. "For if we com-"pare the maſs of gold and ſilver in the whole "world with the quantity of merchandizes there-"in contained, it is certain that every commo-"dity or merchandize in particular may be com-"pared to a certain portion of the intire maſs "of gold or ſilver." † The moſt ignorant people have ideas of that which conſtitutes property, and our natures recoil againſt all invaders of it. The public papers from Berlin ſay, that

* B. xxii. Chap. 8. † Sp. of Laws, B. xxii. Chap. 37.

that the people there can hardly believe the French have obtained a monopoly of all the ſalt-petre of the Ruſſian empire that is to be exported; as it would be too ſtrong a meaſure for a miniſter, even in Ruſſia, to hinder the people from ſelling their produce to thoſe who give moſt.

It was not uncommon, in former days, for acts of parliament to be made in England for fixing prices on many commodities; but in the moſt trying circumſtances, viz. times of extreme ſcarcity, it has been found neceſſary to repeal ſuch laws as related to the prices of proviſions; for the people who were owners of them would not ſell at all, whilſt they were reſtrained to this parliamentary price; therefore, tho' there was the form of law for ſettling rates for the purchaſe of neceſſaries, yet if people would not bring them to market (which no legiſlative authority could oblige them to do) what was to be done? The revoking ſuch acts, and leaving people to buy and ſell as they could, became indiſpenſable at laſt; and 'tis impoſſible to ſay, at this time of day, what dire effects ſuch abſurd reſtrictions might have on the kingdom; but thus much we know, that the huſbandmen of former days were ſo diſcouraged, they would not cultivate their lands, becauſe in times of plenty they could not find a vent for their produce (all exportation of proviſion being then prohibited); therefore a few unfriendly ſeaſons always occaſioned great ſcarcity, and were ſometimes productive of dreadful famines. A deſcription of one famine, about 1314, is given in the note from Rapin *.

* " The loſs ſuſtained by the Engliſh in the wars was followed by a dreadful famine, which laſted three years, and deſtroyed

" The ſpirit of trade, ſaith the baron De Mon-
" teſquieu,† produces in the mind of man a cer-
" tain ſenſe of exact juſtice." He ſays likewiſe,
" Thoſe who traffic with each other become re-
" ciprocally dependent; one has an intereſt in
" buying, the other has an intereſt in ſelling;
" and it is the opinion of being in great certainty,
" as to the poſſeſſion and ſecurity of property in
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deſtroyed an infinite number of people. In vain did the parliament endeavour to help it by ſettling the price of proviſions; they were forced the next year to revoke the act that had been paſſed on that account, in which it was enacted and proclaimed, that the beſt ox, not fed with grain, ſhould be ſold for 16 ſhillings and no more; and if fed with corn, then for 24 ſhillings at moſt; the beſt live fat cow for 12 ſhillings; a fat hog two years old, 3 ſhillings and 4 pence; a fat weather, 20 pence at moſt; a fat hen for one penny; two chickens, one penny; and 24 eggs for one penny; and thoſe who would not ſell theſe things ſo, were to forfeit them to the king. Mean time the famine raged in ſo terrible a manner, that one can hardly give credit to what hiſtorians ſay of it. They are not content with telling us, the moſt loathed animals were uſed for food; but, what is much more horrible, people were forced to hide their children with all imaginable care, to prevent their being ſtolen and eaten by thieves. They aſſure us, that men themſelves took precautions to hinder their being murdered in private places, knowing there were but too many inſtances that ſome had been ſerved in that manner, to feed ſuch as could find no other ſubſiſtence. We are told likewiſe, that the priſoners in the goals devoured one another in a barbarous manner, the extreme ſcarcity of proviſions not permitting their being allowed neceſſary food. The bloody-flux, cauſed by groſs feeding, completed the miſery of the Engliſh; ſuch numbers died every day, that hardly could the living ſuffice to bury the dead. The only remedy that could be found againſt the famine, but which was not capable of bringing all the neceſſary relief, was to prohibit, on pain of death, the brewing any ſort of beer, to the end the corn uſually expended that way, might ſerve to make bread."

† Sp. of Laws, B. xx. Chap. 2.

" commercial ſtates, which induces the mer-
" chants to undertake great things."

The great advantages accruing to any nation by encouragements to agriculture and commerce, have not eſcaped the obſervation of Britiſh legiſlators, by whom many excellent laws have been framed, relative to theſe ſubjects; it muſt therefore be owing to the inattention of thoſe great men, who have in other reſpects ſo well diſtinguiſhed themſelves, that the oppreſſive and narrow-ſpirited regulations of Edward the Sixth are ſtill unrepealed; or elſe to an opinion generally received, that being obſcure and contradictory, they lay dormant; or, that as they do not now operate in the regulation of any of the ways of trade, they ought to be regarded no more than a dead letter; for were theſe narrow and malignant ſchemes to be put in execution, our huſbandmen, as Mr. Hume obſerves, would be reduced to the ſame ſtate of ſloth and ignorance that prevailed formerly; the greateſt part of the land would lie uncultivated; and in that abject condition all our domeſtic commerce would neceſſarily languiſh, till a gradual decline overwhelmed it with unavoidable deſtruction.

Due care is taken by all good legiſlators, to make every poſſible proviſion for the inferior orders, the manufacturer, the mechanic, and the labourer: theſe conſtitute a great part of the community, and contribute much to the ſtrength and opulence of a kingdom. But the regulations made concerning proviſions for the ſupport even of thoſe uſeful members of ſociety, are to be conſiſtent with the ſtricteſt rules of juſtice and equity; for the ruling power ſhould both defend individuals in the poſſeſſion of their property, and inſure the means of ſubſiſtence to all who

uſe honeſt endeavours to obtain it. This ſubſiſtence therefore muſt be provided without encroaching on the rights of private people, otherwiſe we recur to the ſavage laws of force, inſtead of thoſe which are framed for the good of ſociety.

Sir William Temple obſerves, that trade thrives beſt in free ſtates; for in them it finds ſomething peculiarly proper and natural to its proſperity. Under arbitrary reſtraints it will always decay; "for when men are in doubt of enjoying what they get, their diffidence extinguiſhes induſtry. And as trade cannot live without mutual truſt amongſt private men, ſo it cannot grow or thrive to any degree, without a confidence both of public and private ſafety; and conſequently a truſt in the government, from an opinion of its ſtrength, wiſdom, and juſtice." *

As maxims which have been founded on the obſervation and experience of great and eminent men who have wrote on theſe important ſubjects, will beſt ſerve to illuſtrate the arguments which may be offered to prove, that every undue reſtraint on the freedom of trade will inevitably be attended with the moſt pernicious conſequences; the reader muſt expect to find ſuch maxims frequently introduced, in the courſe of the following pages, the more effectually to convince thoſe who ſtill entertain little prejudices, and are either influenced by firſt appearances or terrified by trifling difficulties.

It is perhaps never more incumbent on magiſtrates to be extremely ſtrict and vigilant in aſcertaining

* Obſervations on the United Provinces. Edit. 1693. page 214.

taining the diſtinctions between one man's effects and another's; and preſerving the rights of property to each, than in times of dearth and ſcarcity; becauſe there is the utmoſt danger that all the bonds of ſociety will be broken, as ſoon as people begin to dread a real famine; for when that is the caſe, mankind is reduced to a ſtate of war: neceſſity has no laws; and people will feed on each other, rather than be utterly deſtitute of food.

Therefore, altho' in ſuch times of dearth there may ſeem to be many hard and unconſcionable bargains made, yet while ſociety exiſts, and both buyer and ſeller are under the protection of laws, the rule in trade ſtill to be obſerved, is the conſent of the parties who fix the price; ſince by the law of nature every man is free to make the beſt advantage he can, provided there be no deceit in the coin, or impoſition in the commodity.

The legiſlature cannot, by interpoſition in theſe matters, attempt a remedy without invading the property of one ſubject in favour of another; "for no public rights can be ſuppoſed "to extend to the doing a private injury, any "more than private rights ſhould be extended "to the power of doing a public injury, as both "practices would be repugnant to the principles "of ſocial compact."

It may here be obſerved, that in order to obtain a ſupply of proviſions on ſuch terms as are conſiſtent with the general and equitable rules of ſociety, many foreign princes and ſtates, who have been alarmed with apprehenſions of approaching ſcarcity, have lately been buying and procuring proviſions from neighbouring countries which are bleſſed with greater plenty than

their

their own, and give extraordinary encouragement to thoſe who improve and cultivate lands for the future encreaſe of ſupplies. Theſe ſo ſalutary meaſures are highly commendable, and truly conformable to the rules of well ordered ſociety; as would an equal tax on the rich to buy at any rate, and in any part of the world, all neceſſary proviſion for the helpleſs and the diſtreſſed.

Bags of money, which will procure corn, are equal to bags of hoarded corn; if therefore, on any exigency, the legiſlative power touches the corn of one ſubject, and ſpares the gold of another, it acts oppreſſively and unjuſtly.

The man who has lead (for inſtance) to ſell, and would buy gold for one purpoſe, and wheat for another, may as well complain that in the way of traffic he who has gold values it too highly, as that he who has wheat over-rates his commodity, and he has alſo juſt the ſame pretence to plunder one as the other; for, as Mr. Locke very wiſely obſerves, "He that will juſtly eſtimate that value of any thing, muſt conſider its quantity in proportion to its vent, for this alone regulates the price."*

It is in vain therefore to attempt an effectual reduction in the price of any thing by law: an act for ſuch a purpoſe would ſerve only to increaſe the arts of the buyer and ſeller to evade the law: it might give them trouble and perplexity, but would not anſwer the purpoſe for which it was intended.

But ſuppoſing the act ſo contrived that it anſwer'd the purpoſe of it's inſtitution, and actually aſcertained the intrinſic value of a commodity; never-

* Eſſays on Money, Intereſt, &c. p. 61.

nevertheleſs, the ſtrict execution of ſuch a law would be attended with that worſt of all oppreſſions, the invaſion of property ; and what obligation can a man owe, or what allegiance can be due to any ſtate, that will not defend him in his right over his own goods ?

The affection of every ſubject will be ſecured to government, while government yields him a neceſſary protection ; and it muſt be owing to the indolence and weakneſs of thoſe in power, if the people are not kept in due order and ſubjection.

It muſt be acknowledged that it is a matter deſerving conſideration, how far the internal frame of our great ſtate machine is ill conſtructed or impaired ; and how far any neglect in the reparation of its faults may have contributed to advance the price of all proviſions and manufactures, ſo as to endanger the ruin of the very commerce which has made us great.

Among many other cauſes which enhance the price of commodities, one of the chief is the want of that protection from government, which ſecures the property of inferior traders, ſo neceſſary, as above hinted, to the well being of a ſtate.

The difficulty alſo, not to ſay the impoſſibility of recovering ſmall debts (viz. ſuch as are under the value of 10 l. or in ſome places 40 s) obliges the trader to exact large profits on thoſe things which he ſells to poor labourers or manufacturers.

'Tis utterly impoſſible to hinder one man from truſting another, by any diſcouragements from government ; it ſeems likewiſe to be a dangerous experiment in ſociety to deſtroy the truſt and confidence which even the meaneſt people repoſe in each other, by giving impunity to thoſe

wretches who ſhall violate ſuch truſt or confidence.

Yet there have not been wanting men in this kingdom, who, finding applications by great numbers of the lower ranks of people for relief in theſe matters, incommodious to them as magiſtrates, have inſiſted on the neceſſity of diſcouraging and deſtroying all ſuch private credit as falls within thoſe narrow bounds; and who, to that end, would put it out of the power of creditors for ſmall ſums, to find redreſs by law.

From hence it is, that we have more general complaints of profligacy and wickedneſs in the common people, than any other country. Profuſion and drunkenneſs are the vices of Engliſh eaſe and ſpirit; and perhaps our climate may contribute to theſe evident imperfections. The unhappy man who exhauſts in an evening the induſtry of a week, ſinks the reward of his labour, deadens his vigour, and perhaps deſtroys his health; and all this he will ſay he has a right to do as a freeborn Engliſhman: for whatever reſtraints are laid on trade, there are very few laws made for keeping the common people within the bounds of morality or temperance. The eccleſiaſtical laws do not operate againſt poor people; we therefore inflict no puniſhments on them for adultery, inceſt, lying, and other vices very pernicious to ſociety. A poor wretch may promiſe very punctually to pay a debt, and may perhaps intend it when he firſt obtains the loan of any thing; but if he ſhould be diſhoneſt, or ſhould be diſabled by any accident from performing ſuch a promiſe, how is he to be compelled?

The laws of England do not conſider labour and money † or land to be on a par, ſo that the workman whe earns half an ounce of ſilver every day, is as well able to pay any ſum of money, and contribute to any public expence, as he who has an eſtate in land of forty-five pounds a year; therefore our laws do not compel a man to labour for the payment of debts; for if he is thrown into priſon, his labour is loſt to his creditor, and perhaps to the public; and in many inſtances, if he can prove himſelf to be deſtitute of money or goods, the creditor is obliged to cancel the debt, whilſt the landed man in the like circumſtances may be kept a priſoner during life.

But that kind of diſhoneſty in the loweſt of the people, which has the worſt effect on the prices of our manufacturers, is the refuſing to pay ſuch debts as the law does not take cognizance of, nor puniſh in any adequate manner, viz. debts which are under ten pounds. In this caſe the debtor knows that the money cannot be recovered but at an expence exceeding ten pounds, if he has any mind to conteſt the point with his creditor; ſo that nothing but the ſpirit of revenge ever ſtirs up traders to puniſh this kind of diſhoneſty, becauſe 'tis attended with ſuch expence and trouble.

The trader takes another method to indemnify himſelf. As he neither will, nor can bear theſe loſſes without inevitable ruin, he makes the honeſt and induſtrious poor people pay every one of them a part of their diſhoneſt neighbour's

† Sir William Petty looked upon this notion of the par of land and labour, to be one of the moſt important conſiderations in political œcomonics.

debts, by exacting ſuch a profit on his goods, as, however neceſſary to his ſupport under theſe circumſtances, would be exorbitant if he did not run ſuch riſks.

The uncertainty therefore of payment in ſuch caſes, is one cauſe of the exorbitant profits on the neceſſaries of life. The traders, however, are not herein deſerving of blame; for they do no more than reaſon and law will juſtify. Every man who has prudence will, in every action of life, endeavour to proportion his gains to his riſks; or, in other words, no man will undertake any buſineſs but with a view to an adequate reward. The method then to be taken by the legiſlature with ſuch retailers, ſhould be to leſſen the riſk, by veſting a power in ſome of the inferior departments of magiſtracy, to hear and determine in a ſummary manner (perhaps the aſſiſtance of a jury, to be ſummoned as eaſily as a coroner's jury, would give moſt ſatisfaction to the people and be an eaſe to magiſtrates) ſuch cauſes between debtor and creditor as ſhall not be of a concern or value exceeding ten pounds.

It is left to the breaſt of magiſtrates, in many inſtances, to determine (without a jury) matters of much greater conſequence to the liberty and property of Britiſh ſubjects, particularly in affairs relating to the exciſe; land-tax; and poſt-office; than any unjuſt or injudicious determination on this point could occaſion.

It is not foreign to the preſent purpoſe juſt to hint, that the laws in England relating to the pariſh poor, or the abuſe and neglect of thoſe laws, muſt very much affect the prices of all things. The hand that is idle, inſtead of being a benefit, becomes detrimental to ſociety; becauſe it ſteals

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from the hand which is employed ; and becauſe the nouriſhment which ſhould ſupport the induſtrious is drained away to feed the lazy. In other countries every man muſt work, or expect a ſpeedy diſtreſs ; here there is no ſuch dread among the lower ranks of people : they generally rely on the pariſh for a maintenance on every frivolous pretence ; and they demand relief in caſes wherein they would be afraid to requeſt a charity in ſome countries.

No miſconduct, extravagance, or debauchery that poor perſons have been guilty of, is to be alledged againſt them by the pariſh-officers ; the poor muſt be maintained, whether they are diſabled from ſupporting themſelves by any inevitable accident, or by their vices.

The neceſſities of the aged, the ſick, and the orphan, ought to be ſupplied at all times, as ſhould the real wants of all other diſtreſſed perſons ; for momentary neceſſities will ſometimes befal the moſt induſtrious : but the baron De Monteſquieu gives it as his opinion in theſe caſes, " That as the evil is momentary, tranſient " aſſiſtances are much better than perpetual " foundations." * May not a hint be taken from the before-mentioned maxim ? viz. Labour and money are at all times equivalent to each other (in certain degrees and proportions) ; any relief therefore granted to poor perſons on any emergency, ſhould be deemed a debt contracted by ſuch poor perſons, who ſhould always be liable to pay it, whenever bodily health or improved condition enables them to do it.

It is thought a great benefit to the poor in Holland, that they can obtain loans from the pub-

* Sp. of Laws, B. xxiii. Chap. 29.

public on very eaſy terms; this relief, by means of the pariſh-officers in England, would be more extenſive. Such officers might enter every ſum, print and publiſh the ſtate of the pariſh accounts every year, for the inſpection of all the pariſhioners, who would eaſily judge whether ſuch neighbours as had at any time received relief were able to repay it.

Something ſhould be done; for 'tis no ſmall burthen on the trade and manufactures of this country, to pay three millions per annum to ſupport in a uſeleſs, not to ſay idle ſtate of life, ſo great a number of people; when, by the proper application of a conſiderably leſs ſum, they might probably be rendered ſerviceable.

The poor-tax is a growing one; it has been encreaſing ever ſince its commencement at a prodigious rate; for at the latter end of the reign of Charles II. it was ſaid to amount to no more than 665362 *l.* per annum.

If any remedy can be applied to the real and increaſing evils which have crept into our ſyſtem of civil government, it were better to have recourſe to ſuch remedies, than attempt to force a price on any thing by law.

We know, from the example of the Dutch, that freedom of trade will always fill markets in proportion to the call; and reduce prices at one market nearly to the level of any other diſtant market, allowing for carriage.

As the Dutch ports are always open, they have allproviſions on the cheapeſt terms they can be procured in any part of the world; and it is remarkable, that although they raiſe no corn, comparatively ſpeaking, yet in dear times theirs is the cheapeſt market in Europe; and landed gentlemen in England have formed ſchemes (which how-

however were never carried into execution) to prohibit the Iriſh from buying corn of the Dutch, for the ſake of keeping up the nominal value of our lands by confining the Iriſh to our markets.

We of this nation pique ourſelves upon being a ſenſible people (and in ſome inſtances very juſtly); yet with regard to the general intereſt in the neceſſary ſupply of proviſions, and in the encouragement thereby given to manufactures, no nation is guilty of greater abſurdities.

We call this a proviſion-country; and in order to obtain a ſhare in the trade of proviſions which is carried on throughout the world, we give an enormous bounty; yet for fear land ſhould not keep up to a certain nominal value, we ſhut our ports againſt grain of all ſorts; particularly againſt oats at certain low prices, and againſt ſome other proviſions which are raiſed by our fellow-ſubjects in Ireland and North-America.

We call this a manufacturing-country, and yet diſable our induſtrious mechanics from furniſhing themſelves with neceſſary ſubſiſtence at the natural and intrinſic price,* which would impower them to vie with their rivals in other nations. Indeed, we prohibit foreign manufactures from being worn here, though they make a progreſs all over the world beſides, to the infinite detriment of our own.

Trade will follow cheapneſs; if we deſire a ſhare in the trade of manufactures, can we render thoſe manufactures too cheap? If a ſhare in the proviſion-trade, can proviſions be too plenty?

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* Beſides which, we impoſe very unjuſt and unequal taxes; a gentleman drinks as good beer at 2 *d.* a quart as a poor mechanic does at 4 *d.* one man pays as much per annum land-tax on 1000 *l.* as another on 10000 *l.*

Two ſhip-loads of corn, at thirty ſhillings per quarter, will bring more money into the kingdom, employ more ſailors, and more raiſe the value of land, than one ſuch ſhip-load at fifty ſhillings per quarter. Can corn then be too cheap here for our manufactures, for the encouragement of population, or even for the advancement of the landed intereſt?

We complain of the increaſe of horſes, and of the immenſe conſumption of oats: why ſhould we not import oats at all times? not for horſes only, but for all kinds of cattle. How many corn-fed oxen would be brought to market, if oats could be bought cheap enough for that purpoſe?

Buying up the ſuperfluity of corn, in times of plenty, is a great encouragement in agriculture; if our farmers find themſelves under-ſold in one ſort of grain, they will raiſe the more of another.

Whenever the laws to prevent the importation of cattle, butter, &c. from Ireland are in force, they give a monopoly to our breeding and dairy counties. The increaſe of people has increaſed the conſumption of theſe things; whilſt the quantity of old paſture-lands being the ſame as formerly, the produce of them, viz. cheeſe, butter, and fat meat, cannot be increaſed by any improvements in dairy buſineſs or grazing, in any due proportion to the increaſed demand.

This is perhaps the beſt reaſon which can be aſſigned for the extraordinary price which theſe commodities bear, even in times (within twenty years paſt) when corn has happened to be cheap.

The incloſure of waſte lands, for the purpoſes of agriculture, will undoubtedly render corn cheap; but as the prices of butter and cheeſe have not fluctuated ſo much as the prices of corn, nor been

been rendered much lower by very plentiful crops of paſturage, there is probably no other remedy for the dearneſs of the former, but open ports, at all times, for Iriſh proviſions.

In our enquiries concerning the probable cauſes of the riſe of all ſorts of proviſions, we are to diſtinguiſh between the gradual riſe (from the rates of former days) and the particular and ſudden riſe which has happened within a few years. The gradual advancement muſt undoubtedly be imputed to the opulent ſtate of the kingdom.*

Money is at leaſt nine-tenths lower (not in England only, but over moſt parts of Europe) than it was 100 years ago; † for every augmentation of gold, ſilver, jewels, or any other valuable merchandize, has this effect, that it heightens the price of labour and of all neceſſaries. We know by experience, that prices have riſen three or four times by large ſtrides, ſince money has been multiplied by extenſive trading; and 'tis generally acknowledged, that paper-currency, or ideal money, has the ſame effect on trade as real money.

How much the nation is enriched by foreign traffic, no one can aſcertain by any calculation; but we know, that the vaſt increaſe of the national debt has occaſioned a great increaſe of ſtock at market; the quantity, when 140 mil-

* The medium of the annual ſupplies, granted by parliament to ſupport the wars of King William, were 5,105,505 *l.* of Queen Anne, 5,369,621 *l.* King George II. firſt war, 6,651,013 *l.* of King George II. and III. 13,229,376.

† In 1237 wheat was by the quarter 3 *s.* 4 *d.* barley 2 *s.* oats 1 *s.* In 1258 there was ſo great a famine that many people were ſtarved, ſo that a quarter of wheat was ſold at 16 *s.*
Bp. Fleetwood's Chron. Pretioſum, p. 62.

lions of ſtock are in circulation, being double to what there was a few years ago, when we owed but 70 millions; the diſparity muſt have the ſame effect on the prices of commodities as the accumulation of ſo much real caſh; which, added to the profits accruing from our extenſive trade for a few years paſt, occaſions as it were a ſudden influx of riches, and this, beſides its effect on the *gradual* riſe of proviſions, has contributed, in a great meaſure, to their *ſudden* enhancement. But the ſudden riſe which we now feel, and which is ſo generally complained of, as the conſequence of foreſtalling, is abſolutely, and beyond doubt, chiefly owing to the ſhortneſs of the late corn crops, and the ſmallneſs of the quantity at market.

We have had extremes of wet and extremes of dry weather for four or five years paſt; ſome of theſe ſeaſons have been of the longeſt continuance ever known within the memory of man.

Every body acknowledges that exceſs either of dry or wet weather will obſtruct vegetation, and that very rainy ſeaſons have always been reckoned particularly hurtful to this country: yet we have had ſuch inundations within the above-mentioned ſpace of time, that many thouſand acres of our richeſt and moſt fruitful lands have been rendered unfit for cattle to ſtand on; and ſtreams of water have iſſued from all the *hunger* ſprings; (as they are called by the country people, becauſe they formerly denoted approaching dearths and famines;) ſo that it is moſt probably owing to the cultivation of the more hilly and ſhallow lands, which in ancient days were not employed in agriculture, (for our fore-fathers would only beſtow their labour on the beſt ſoils) that we have not experienced ſuch dearths as the ſame

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unkindly ſeaſons would have occaſioned in former times.

It muſt be acknowledged, however, that beſides the ſcarcity from ſcorching droughts, and from long continued rains, the home conſumption of proviſions has been very conſiderably increaſed within a few years. Every city and flouriſhing town in Great-Britain and Ireland is enlarged (London nearly doubled): we are diſperſed in colonies, where much of the home produce is taken off; ſhipping conſumes a great deal; manufactures have exceedingly flouriſhed (witneſs the high prices of wool); and the labouring people who have high wages generally ſpend all they earn, and therefore conſume much more than when wages were low.——To all this may be added, the effects of a briſk exportation, perhaps too much encouraged by the bounty of government.

It will not admit of a doubt, whether we are benefited by the exportation of proviſions; reaſon and experience determine in the affirmative: the people of this kingdom would have but a poor chance in the ſtruggle for a ſhare of the riches of the world, if by laws made here, they were prevented from obtaining the natural price, or what is called the intrinſic value, of all their commodities.

But doubts will ariſe concerning the propriety of bounties, except in the infant ſtate of any undertaking; and it is a queſtion requiring the moſt ſerious conſideration, whether the bounty on corn, as it is at preſent managed, in its effects is not a burthen on our trade and manufactures equal to a tax of 5 *s.* per quarter on all the wheat which is conſumed at home; and in propor-

tion on all other kinds of grain which are intitled to the bounty on exportation.*

This is a tribute paid to the landed intereſt, rather too great for trade (flouriſhing even as it is) to bear. The bounty was looked upon, when granted by an act of 1ſt of William and Mary, as a recompence to the landholders for the too heavy tax (as it was then thought) to be laid on them, and was expected to be really rather a diſcouragement to manufactures.

If the vaſt ſums of money which have been paid by the government by way of bounty, in the courſe of ſeventy-ſeven years, had been applied to the improveme nt of the waſte lands throughout this iſland, the rental † would not be leſs than it is at preſent, altho' proviſions would be much cheaper, ſo as probably to force a vent for foreign markets, or (which would have been better) exceedingly to multiply the people at home.

In order to aſcertain the intrinſic value of any thing, we are to ſuppoſe a point or center ſomewhere; to which point the variations in value muſt be brought. Suppoſe, for inſtance, tin

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* The Britiſh Merchant, vol. ii. p. 247, ſays, "If "we were to become a province to France, we ſhould be "obliged to give a bounty on wool, as we do on our corn, "that France might have it cheaper than our people." Bounties ſerve to feed foreigners cheaper than ourſelves.

† If Dr. Davenant calculated truly, the whole rental of England in 1600 was only ſix mills, and the price of lands at 12 years purchaſe; and in 1688, the rental 14 mills, and the price of lands 18 years purchaſe: the income on the lands and ſtock in trade were, however, eſtimated at 20 mills. When the land-tax took place, it was ſaid lately by a great man, to be now worth 60 mills, but has been ſtill yearly taxed at 20 mills. How many additional duties have been laid in this ſpace of time on beer and malt?

tin could be procured no where in the world but at one port in Cornwal, its value in every other place would be juſt ſo much as the amount of carriage, and other contingent expences, added to the prime coſt.

Suppoſe Amſterdam the central point of the price of corn throughout Europe, (or the whole world) the ſuperfluity of Engliſh corn muſt then be regulated by that price, or it will lie on hand and periſh.——Where trade is open, no one will give more to his neighbour (in wholeſale dealing) for any commodity than what he can purchaſe it for at ſome diſtant place; therefore no one will give more in London, than the price at Amſterdam added to the freight: the intrinſic value being the medium or average price between any two or more places.

The price on any ſpot where a merchant reſides, compared with the prices in other places, determines his choice, whether to buy or ſell. The fluctuation of prices is the life and ſoul of trade.—Suppoſe the merchant buys wheat in Amſterdam to bring to London, at a time when the price in London is 40 s. per quarter; he muſt buy at, or under, 38 s. 6 d. the freight at leaſt being 1 s. 6 d. per quarter: on the other hand, in order to ſell for 40 s. at Amſterdam, he cannot give more than 38 s. 6d. in London.

But the legiſlature interferes, for the ſake of keeping up the nominal value of lands, and allows a bounty on the exportation of ſuch ſuperfluity. In this caſe the merchant can give in London, 43 s. 6 d. being 5 s. per quarter above its intrinſic value (in every other part of the univerſe) and of courſe the whole quantity of wheat in Great Britain, (which will be governed by the

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London market) is raiſed thereby 5 s. per quarter.

The people of this kingdom, beſides corn, conſume many other neceſſaries and conveniencies of life, which are incumbered with heavy duties at prices far above the real and natural value; therefore the government allows draw-backs on exportation, for the ſake of our obtaining a ſhare in the univerſal trade of thoſe commodities; juſt as, for the ſake of the landed intereſt, it forces a trade in corn by the allowance of bounty.

But the difference to the people in general between theſe two circumſtances is very great; for the five ſhillings per quarter above par in the unnatural price (occaſioned by the bounty) goes into private hands; while ſo much as is above par in the natural price on any commodity occaſioned by taxes, is applied to public uſes, and is conducive to the general good.

For as every man is bound to contribute to the public revenue, in proportion to the benefits he receives from the public protection; ſo no man has a right to complain, whilſt particular care is taken in the impoſition of taxes, that they are not unequally laid: for, as Mr. Hobbes very well obſerves, "Aburthen which the whole "body of ſubjects may probably think eaſy, "and gentle, will, if any conſiderable number "releaſe and excuſe themſelves, lie heavy and "inſupportable upon the reſt."

Equality in theſe caſes is equity. Every one who deſires to enjoy the ſweets of ſociety, is ready to pay toward the defence of himſelf and his fortune; nor will he complain when taxes are fairly impoſed, and faithfully applied in the ſervice of the public; eſpecially when neither the laws

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nor the interpretation of them are made in favour of the rich and the powerful.

Perhaps one of the greateſt miſchiefs which could attend the partial inſtitution of laws in favour of the rich, would be this, that the honeſty of the common people would be corrupted: when they ſaw themſelves oppreſſed, they would be ready to break out into any outrages which wicked and deſigning men (taking an advantage of their diſcontents) might prompt them to.

With reſpect to the firſt introduction of the bounty on exportation of corn, it is worthy of remark, that the quick tranſitions of our lawgivers in ſome inſtances from one extreme to another, ſeem to imply that they have been influenced more by the public opinion, and popular clamour, than by their own mature deliberation.

Poor and diſtreſſed perſons are at one time ſuch objects of general compaſſion, that at all events they muſt be provided for and maintained, as by act 45 Eliz. whether there may be employment for them in their reſpective pariſhes or not; but when we conſider that act, is it not extraordinary that in the ſame reign a few years before, the vagabond poor, and idle people were ſo obnoxious to the government, and deemed ſo general a nuiſance, as to have cruel anti-conſtitutional martial laws employed againſt them: the commiſſion iſſued by the Queen expreſſing, "that upon ſignification given by the "juſtices of the peace, they ſhould be openly "executed in the preſence of ſuch juſtices, ac-"cording to the martial law."

How wavering was the conduct of our government in the reign of Charles II, and William and Mary, with reſpect to that important point,

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the exportation of corn! In the beginning of Charles II's reign, the prohibitive againſt it was abſolute. In 1663 an act paſſed "*for the encouragement of trade*," wherein wheat at 48 s. barley at 28 s. the quarter, are permitted to be exported, but encumbered with tonnage and poundage amounting to 20 s. on each quarter of wheat, and 10 s. on each quarter of barley.—In 1670 another act paſſed "*for the improvement of tillage*," in which the exportation of corn is allowed, altho' the prices thereof exceed the former rates; and this act greatly leſſens the cuſtom and poundage. By theſe means agriculture was enlarged and improved, and as the advantages of exportation ſo evidently appeared, could too much be then done to promote it?—If foreigners would buy ſeven buſhels, we would for the ſake of export give them the eighth (at 40 s. per quarter); therefore in 1688, the act paſſed to allow a bounty where corn ſhould be ſold at a low price.

Here it is obſervable, that, notwithſtanding money was more valuable then than now, yet by the act in 1670, corn was permitted to be exported when it ſhould be at higher rates than when by the act in 1688, it was intitled to the bounty, viz. the bounty to be paid when wheat ſhould not exceed 48 s. per quarter, &c. which is here reckoned within the boundaries of what the act calls a low price; yet at this price, in the year 1766, when this country abounds with caſh and other wealth, we are all in an uproar, and ſeem to dread a famine, from which commercial ſtates have always the leaſt to fear.

By our extenſive trade and navigation we have brought many millions of money into this kingdom, ſo that the wages of our manufacturers and

labourers exceed thoſe of any other nation, and our people can afford to buy proviſions from their mouths.

We have fellow-ſubjects in America, who have lands ſo plenty, that they can perhaps raiſe corn cheaper than any people in Europe.

We have fellow-ſubjects in Ireland, who ſell beef, pork, butter, cattle, &c. to other European nations, cheaper than they can be bought any where elſe; and we have as abſolute a power over their ports, with reſpect to embargoes and prohibitions, as we have over our ports in America, or our ports immediately at home.

We have ſhipping in abundance, that can bring the neceſſaries of life from any cheaper country, where our money will be very acceptable in exchange; and if there be any proviſions to be found in the whole world, ſuch proviſions are moſt peculiarly within our reach. Yet among us, the noble, generous, exalted friends to the rights and liberties of mankind;—one fellow ſubject rails, and even proceeds to outrages againſt another, becauſe proviſions are dear, in ſuch a manner as would ſcarcely be expected from the lawleſs Arab or the ſavage of America; for ſurely nothing can diſgrace a country more than the plundering of merchants and fair traders; men who act agreeable to the laws of their country, and who have an equal title with every other-fellow ſubject to protection.

If the author of theſe ſheets ſhould be thought to expreſs himſelf with too much vehemence and ſeverity in ſome inſtances, he deſires to make this excuſe;—That he is a great ſufferer by outrages, which he thinks have been too much countenanced by many who ſhould better know the duties due to ſociety. He is however injured

in a ſtill more tender part than his property, by attacks on his good name; by the reproaches of his countrymen and acquaintance, with which the injury done to his property by the riotous and plundering mob, (tho' very conſiderable) are not to be mentioned. To be treated as a contraband dealer; and calumniated, as an enemy to his country, by ſome whom he would wiſh to be his friends, are things which ſenſibly affect him; eſpecially when his only crime is to carry on a fair trade (as he believes his to be) in his proper and conſtant calling, viz. buying by wholeſale in the country, an article of common conſumption for the ſupply of the city of London.

Here he would add a few words in behalf of the poor deluded wretches who have in ſo many parts of the kingdom been excited to commit ſuch riots, thefts, and other high crimes and miſdemeanours, as, if proſecuted to the utmoſt rigour of the law, would incur the forfeiture of their lives.

When proviſions are dear and hunger pinches, 'tis natural for people to complain: the truly induſtrious poor will do rather more work than abate in quantity of food, which, however, makes work the ſcarcer, and 'tis double diſtreſs to have proviſions riſe and labour ſink. This excites murmuring and diſcontents, which at firſt reach only the ears of their immediate employers, who, when urged to pay higher wages on account of the dearneſs of neceſſaries, are glad to ſhift the blame on others, and too readily lay it on the dealers in proviſion; in this too (fatally for ſuch dealers) they have the countenance of ſome old laws.—Theſe laws are printed in every news-paper, and ſtuck up in every corner, by order of the juſtices, to intri-

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midate the engroſſers, againſt whom many murmurings are propagated.—The common people are taught to entertain a very high opinion and reverence for theſe laws; and indeed they ſeem chiefly adapted to the capacities and notions of the loweſt order of mankind, who have no other idea of trade than the exchange of one thing for another, and can ſee no reaſon why the price of food ſhould vary more than the price of labour. The advance of price in the former is imputed to the rapaciouſneſs of the owners,—or to the preference given to foreign nations, who buy up proviſions here on purpoſe to ſtarve, and then to conquer us.—What will not the fear of want (artfully excited by ſuperiours) put a man upon doing?—Under this terror he grows deſperate;——groundleſs terror indeed! when, by ſubmiſſion to the rules of civil ſociety, every poor man (here in England) is entitled to a maintenance when he falls into diſtreſs: but ſome of our rioters have been ſo infatuated as to think they were only aſſiſting the execution of wholeſome laws, and doing their country ſervice.—So far therefore as they were under the influence of ill adviſers, they are intitled to compaſſion from us, and lenity from the laws.

They would of themſelves perhaps be leſs fond of reviving the ſtatutes and regulations of Edward VI. if they were aware that ſome acts paſſed in his reign were more ſevere againſt certain poor perſons, than even againſt foreſtallers; for the act 1. Edw. VI. after declaring in the preamble, "that idle and vagabond perſons, "being unprofitable members, or rather enemies "of the commonwealth, have been ſuffered to "remain and increaſe, whom if they ſhould be "puniſhed with death, whipping, and impriſon-

" ment, it were not without their deſerts, for " the example of others,"—it is enacted, That any idle perſon ſhall be mark'd with a hot iron in the breaſt with a V, and ſhall be a ſlave, and be oblig'd to work by beating, chaining, &c. and if he run away, he ſhall ſuffer death as a felon. Concerning the ſeverity of this act, Mr. Ruffhead obſerves, that the offence herein puniſhed, viz. the idleneſs of the poor, was probably more the fault of the ſtate than of the poor themſelves. * —The condition of the poor of England (as is moſt reaſonable it ſhould be) is much altered for the better by laws now in force: they have the leaſt cauſe to complain of any poor in the world; and it is ſurpriſing that, even in thoſe days of ignorance fellow-creatures ſhould be ſo treated only becauſe they were unfortunate. †

The laws concerning trade in proviſions made in this reign, will perhaps be found to differ as much from the ſpirit of the preſent times, and the nature of commerce, as the above recited act relating to the treatment of the poor. —We were then indeed only emerging from a ſtate of ignorance and darkneſs, with reſpect to trade;—this iſland ſome ages before, being little better than a barren deſart.—Our preſent opulence, power, and ſplendor, are, however, owing to trade, and to improved maxims relating thereto.

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* Preface to ix. Vol. of Stat. at large, page 10.

† Poſſibly, from a miſtaken notion, (as in the caſe of witchcraft) that the injunctions of the Old Teſtament were rules for civil government in chriſtian countries; for Levit. xxv. verſe 39 and 47. if a man was waxen poor, he might ſell himſelf, or be ſold for a ſlave. From the ſame miſtaken notion muſt that ſtatute have had its riſe, which prohibited the taking intereſt of money; yet in the ſtatute made in this king's reign, for the obſervation of the ſabbath, it is permitted that harveſt-work may be done on that day.

thereto.—But ſo long did we remain in ignorance, that until after the Revolution, our native produce and manufactures paid a duty on exportation, and the moſt uſeful materials for manufacture paid a duty on importation: this is mentioned to ſhew, that the ancient laws were not ſo wiſe or ſo ſalutary as ſome perſons ſeem deſirous to repreſent them.

Amongſt the abſurd laws of our forefathers, none are more juſtly complained of than the ſtatutes relating to proviſions of 5 and 6 Edw. VI. However, to ſhew the narrow ſpirit of the times, it may be proper to take notice of the act concerning uſury, framed by the ſame parliament, which neceſſarily muſt have occaſioned a great deal of trouble both to magiſtrates and people; and was therefore ſoon after repealed, while thoſe acts which relate to proviſions were ſuffered to remain in force; which can perhaps be no otherwiſe accounted for, than that the inconvenience of the ſtatutes relative to uſury were experienced; but the inconvenience of the others ſeldom occurred, as they were only in force when proviſions were dear.

This parliament, of the 5 and 6 Ed. VI. could not perceive, when money ſhould be lent to purchaſe land, or any other thing, that it was reaſonable for the lender to have ſome little ſhare of the rent or profits ariſing from ſuch purchaſe; therefore it was enacted, That no perſon ſhould lend any ſum of money, for any manner of uſury, intereſt, or increaſe, to be received or hoped for, above the ſum lent, upon pain to forfeit the principal and intereſt, to ſuffer impriſonment, and to be fined at the king's pleaſure.

'Tis worth obſerving, that when the profits of commerce and manufactures rendered it neceſ-

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ſary to permit the lending of money upon intereſt, and to fix the legal rate of it at ten in the hundred; the ſtatute Eliz. 13, 8. declares, that all uſury which ſhall or may be reſerved above the principal (though permitted by this law of the land) is forbidden by the law of God, and that it is a ſin, and deteſtable.

The proviſo in a ſubſequent act, 21 James I. c. 17. is much more ſoft and uncenſuring, viz. "That no words in this law ſhall be expounded "to allow the practice of uſury (by which was "then meant, taking the legal intereſt) in point "of religion or conſcience."

Thus we ſee, that in thoſe days of piety, it was equally forbidden by the laws of this land, to take intereſt on money, or to make profits on proviſion: but both are not declared equally ſinful; for though buying to ſell again was deemed to be an hurtful practice, becauſe the profit on ſuch traffic was then thought rather an extortion on the conſumer, than a juſt reward for the labour of procuring proviſions, yet it was not repreſented to be ſo heinous a ſin as taking intereſt on money, becauſe (as it was thought) money could do no labour.

Thoſe who complain that they are peculiarly hurt by the dearneſs of proviſions, becauſe their incomes only ariſe from the uſe of money in the public funds, ſhould pay a little attention to this point, and ſhould conſider, whether the dearneſs is not more owing to the great quantity of funded money, for which ſo many millions are yearly paid by way of intereſt, than to any practice that can be proved upon thoſe concerned in the proviſion-trade.

Is the nature of things changed with the times? Was it harmleſs then, in the ſight of God,

to buy proviſions for the ſake of profit, and is it ſinful now?

Is it not a happy circumſtance to monied people, and to the peace of the kingdom, that the popular indignation is not artfully excited againſt the proprietors of our funds; and the more eſpecially, as texts of ſcripture, as well as old ſtatutes, may be urged againſt putting money to uſe: yet the monied people ought not to be too ſecure, for it has been more than once publicly mentioned, as a judicious meaſure, to pay off the national debt with a ſponge.

As the humour of the mob is as changeable as the wind, will it not be prudent, for the ſake of that peace and tranquility which the monied people now enjoy, to avoid, as much as poſſible, every cauſe of diſturbance; eſpecially, to avoid this extraordinary pretence, that the power and ſpirit of the mob is neceſſary to inforce the laws?

Notwithſtanding the diſtinctions of ſome, and the enquiries which have been made by others, whether it be reconcileable to rules of equity, that dealers in victuals ſhould be ſubjected to particular rates; will it eaſily enter into the heads of ſenſible men, that extortion and deceit are not as criminal in traffic for a coat as in traffic for a cow?

The law of nature and the common law of England allow every individual to make the moſt of his property, by fair dealing and honeſty; and, by the ſtatute laws, foreſtalling, ingroſſing, and regrating are expreſsly permitted, except under certain circumſtances; for, by this very ſtatute of 5 and 6 Edward VI. when wheat ſhall be commonly at the price of 6s. 8d. and barley 3s. 4d. the quarter or under, it ſhall be lawful to ENGROSS and keep all corn, grain, &c. And by

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ſtat. 5 Eliz. chap. 5. certain commodities, viz. fiſh, oil, wine, ſalt, &c. are, by the expreſs words of the act, permitted to be FORESTALLED and REGRATED.

Can any thing be more abſurd? Can any thing expoſe the ignorance of the times more, even with reſpect to the internal frame of government * — than a law which lays a reſtraint on any commodities in trade, at a time when ſuch commodities ſhall be dear, but takes off thoſe reſtraints when ſuch commodities ſhall become cheap.

When a thing is cheap, will it not bear little impediments? will it not force its way like a torrent? Are not the number of difficulties in trade exceedingly increaſed between the grower and conſumer, by unneceſſary carriage to markets, by the payment of tolls, and by the neceſſity of badgers, and licences for theſe badgers? and do not theſe regulations neceſſarily enhance the price?

If badgers are neceſſary, and 'tis neceſſary they ſhould be appointed by magiſtrates, why muſt they be married men? can they afford to do buſineſs on cheaper terms than ſingle men? — Why muſt they be thirty years of age? can they do more labour, or be more active in their buſineſs than ſingle men? — If 'tis proper for all things to be ſold *in* market, why are badgers expreſs-

* The more ſimple ideas of order and equity are ſufficient to guide a legiſlator, in every thing that regards the internal adminiſtration of juſtice: but the principles of commerce are much more complicated, and require long experience and deep reflection to be well underſtood in any ſtate. The real conſequence of a law or practice is there often contrary to firſt appearances. *Hume's Hiſtory of England under the Houſe of Tudor*, vol. i. p. 61.

expreſsly permitted by licence to buy *out* of market?

Can juſtices of the peace refuſe to grant licences to any perſon who has the legal qualifications?—Is honeſty, or any other moral quality, preſcribed by the law? — Are licences void which may happen to be granted to unmarried men, &c.?

If juſtices of the peace have a power to refuſe licences to all but their friends, have they not a power to grant a monopoly? If they have no power to refuſe, of what uſe then is the licence to badgers, but to give ſuch privileges and excluſive rights to certain country-dealers, as are found to reſtrain trade, and to retard the progreſs of manufactures in ſuch places as are incorporated, and all men excluded who are not free.*

Can a law be deemed in force now, which reſtrains buying and ſelling (at large or in any manner) during ſuch time only as wheat ſhall be at 10 d. a buſhel; eſpecially when ſubſequent acts have taken off all reſtraints, for the ſake of exportation, and permitted ſuch exportation at more than 6 s. per buſhel.—Are not Engliſhmen to be tried by the ſtrict letter of every law? how then can foreſtalling, &c. exiſt now as at firſt? It was lawful when wheat was at 9 d. a buſhel, which was then very common. But as theſe Statutes of Edward the Sixth have been referred to a few years ago, by the higheſt authority, and are ſtill ſo frequently ſpoken of with reverence and reſpect, eſpecially amongſt the

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* In the year 1533, and not before, foreign butchers were permitted to ſell their fleſh in Leadenhall market. By foreign butchers Mr. Stow means, ſuch as had not taken the freedom of London.

Bp. Fleetwood's Chron. Precioſum, p. 94.

loweſt people, it may not be amiſs to put a few queries concerning them.

Is foreſtalling, or the buying any thing on the road, &c. before it is ſtalled or placed in the market, a thing practiſed by any perſons in our days? or, if practiſed, is it hurtful?—If a man buys a thing before 'tis in the market, he has a leſs demand on the market.—Will it not make an ox, for inſtance, the dearer to the conſumer, if a butcher, twenty miles from Smithfield, muſt be compelled to go to that market to buy the ox which was paſſing by his door? and is not the grazier's expence likewiſe inhanced, by travelling to ſuch market and back again?

Can the buying, with intent to ſell again, which is deemed engroſſing, be puniſhable by a law which was made when there was no buying to ſell again, except by the purveyors, &c. who were exempted from the penalties of the act? As at that time the growers of corn and the breeders of cattle ſold in ſmall quantities to every conſumer in market-towns in the country, there was no trading in thoſe things, becauſe people ſubſiſted themſelves on the produce of their lands;—therefore it was not ſo great an abſurdity then as it would be now, to make it criminal to buy, with an intent to ſell again.

As to regrating, would not any one eſteem it a favour, if he happened to come into a market ſo late, as that all of any commodity which he wanted was bought up, if another perſon, who had arrived in time, would oblige him with ſome ſhare of his purchaſe?

But after all, are not theſe laws inexplicable, as the exceptions ſeem to extend to all perſons who buy or ſell, as butchers, poulterers, &c. in

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ſuch manner as *concerns their trade*, or any other perſons *being duly licenſed* ?

The law which forbids farmers to buy for ſeed, except they ſell the ſame quantity of the ſame ſort of corn in the ſame market on the ſame day, is as contradictory to reaſon and the principles of agriculture as any thing can be. Beſides confining the farmer to the very day, by which he may be obliged to ſubmit to an exorbitant price, 'tis frequently the intereſt of the farmer to have ſeed from very diſtant markets, and different ſoil; whilſt, for the ſake of change, his ſeed may be wanted by other farmers, at places that lie in contrary directions.

The ſtatute againſt unlawful combinations is of a piece with the reſt : it is an offence that is not, that cannot be practiſed by any perſons in our days, and as trade is now carried on.—The offence is thus deſcribed by the ſtatute 2 and 3 Edward VI. paſſed A. D. 1548. " Foraſmuch " as of late divers ſellers of victuals, not con- " tented with moderate and reaſonable gain, but " minding to have and take for their victuals, " ſo much as luſt them, have conſpired and co- " venanted together, &c. For reformation " thereof it is ordained and enacted, by the " king our ſovereign lord, the lords and com- " mons, &c. that if any perſons ſhall conſpire, " covenant, promiſe, or make any oaths, that " they ſhall not ſell their victuals but at a cer- " tain price or rule, ſhall forfeit, for the firſt of- " fence, ten pounds to the king's highneſs, &c.

Is this a deſcription of the tranſactions of any ſet of people in our days ? Can our dealers in food fix what price they pleaſe on the buyers by any engagements which, by oaths, they may bind themſelves to the performance of ? Or if 1000

pounds were offered for diſcovery of an offender, in what manner could it be poſſible to find him out ?

Can any thing, but a monopoly, enable the ſeller of any commodity to fix his own price ? Can any capital, or aſſociation in Europe, collect in the neceſſaries of life, a quantity ſufficient to raiſe the general value ?

Can any government on earth raiſe the rate of intereſt, or ſink it at diſcretion ? Is not the rate of intereſt lower in Holland than anywhere elſe, notwithſtanding there is no legal ſtandard, and that any man may ſue for ten per cent, or upwards, if he can prove an agreement for it ? Can we in England even fix the value of money ? Is not coin (both gold and ſilver) daily ſold for more than the legal ſtandard ?

Are not the principal buyers of proviſions, the exporters, the brewers, the meal-men and the diſtillers? Are not theſe truly informed, concerning the prices of the articles of their conſumption in all markets? Will they not buy where the price is loweſt, and regulate the London market accordingly ?

Are there more dealers or jobbers now than there were fifty years ago, in the ſpace of which time, have not proviſions been moderately cheap ? Were the jobbers then leſs covetous of profit, or had they then leſs power over markets than now?

Do not jobbers at leaſt reduce prices at thoſe markets to which they bring any proviſions from cheaper countries ? If in theſe after-times, the old ſtatutes concerning proviſions have been found pernicious in their effects ; if they have been found incompatible with Engliſh liberty, and the rights which every man ought to have over his own goods; if they have been revived as

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the inſtruments of oppreſſion by one ſubject over another, in violation of our improved conſtitution; is it not high time to ſeek for ſome redreſs, by an humble petition to parliament, for a repeal or an amendment of theſe laws?

For many magiſtrates have been officiouſly active, urged, as they ſay, by the ſufferings of the people, to take the letter of theſe almoſt forgotten and diſregarded ſtatutes for the rule of their conduct in the proſecution of ſome ſubmiſſive huckſters, and indigent or terrified jobbers. —Some of theſe magiſtrates have even exceeded the letter, and ſtrained the meaning of theſe exploded laws, in the exerciſe of their power; have encouraged and entered into aſſociations, not to ſuffer any grain to be ſold by ſample; have publiſhed notices, that they will reward informers againſt ſuch as buy in that manner, and puniſh, by proſecution, all thoſe who ſhall buy or ſell any proviſion, except in open market.

How much ſoever the principal factors and more opulent huſbandmen have affected to deſpiſe the menaces and ſummons of theſe gentlemen (well knowing they are not inveſted with ſo much power, in theſe points, as they wiſh to exerciſe: and conceiving that even theſe ſtatutes of Edward VI. could never be brought into uſe and reputation in the king's courts at Weſtminſter, in theſe better times, and under our improved conſtitution): yet 'tis now a matter of ſerious conſideration to ſuch traders and farmers, that, according to the ſtrict letter of theſe ſtatutes, if revivable, they are liable to many inconveniences in their ſeveral callings: harraſſed by laws reſpecting trade, which were framed at a time when there was no trade; when the buying any proviſion, with intent to

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ſell again, was deemed an offence ; when the liberty of Engliſhmen was put into the hands of petty tyrants, and made dependent on the price of wheat ; when their properties might be ſeized, under the pretence of hurtful combinations, which (if practicable then) are impracticable now.

For many years paſt, the traders in, and owners of food have experienced the ſame protection as the traders in other commodities ; therefore very few of the former entertained apprehenſions that they were offending the laws, or were liable to become obnoxious to their neighbours, in thoſe times eſpecially when they might be moſt uſeful.

Inſtead of the eſteem which they thought themſelves, and thoſe of their profeſſion, intitled to, as neceſſary members of the community, they have lately experienced abuſe and reproach from many people of all ranks and degrees, who are exaſperated againſt them, as the ſuppoſed cauſes of public calamities.

Yet their proſecutors, who pretend ſo much to the feelings of humanity for the ſtarving poor, do not examine whether the poor are really ſtarving ; or by what arts or practices any ſet of men can ſo effectually engroſs the fruits of the earth to themſelves, as to lay the reſt of mankind under contributions :—or how, in theſe inſtances, the few ſhould be an over-match for the many ; or the weak ovrecome the ſtrong.

How contradictory to reaſon then is it, to ſuppoſe a ſcarcity can be brought about by wicked men ? yet ſuch a notion is not too extravagant to be imbibed by an infinite number of people.—'Tis in vain to talk of reaſon, or to urge the impoſſibility of it, by any human means—every extraordinary

dinary event is attributed to ſome cauſe or other. —The common people have generally prepoſſeſſed opinions, and a readineſs to give an implicit credit to wonders; they reſolve all difficulties in the manner they have been taught; no matter whether right or wrong:——when their neighbour's cattle happen to die of the murrain or the rot, they often impute the calamity to witchcraft, becauſe they know no better; and are as ſtrongly attached to many prejudices of their forefathers, as if theſe prejudices were the moſt poſitive truths.

Although the belief of inchantments does not ſo much prevail in this country as formerly, yet 'tis obſervable, the repeal of the act againſt witchcraft could not be accompliſhed till the reign of George II. Some recent inſtances of the common people's zeal againſt witchcraft, ſeem to ſhew, that the repeal of that act has not removed the prejudices of many ignorant and obſtinate bigots among all ranks of people.

The difficulty which occurred to our forefathers, in diſcovering the artifices of the engroſſers and foreſtallers, is perhaps the reaſon, that in the king's commiſſion for the appointment of juſtices of the peace, inchantments, ſorceries, arts magic, foreſtallings, regratings, and ingroſſings are ranged together, as offences of a ſimilar nature; becauſe they were committed by wicked perſons, in a manner both amazing and unknown.

It is probably in compliance with theſe prejudices, that juſtices of the peace are ſtill directed, by the king's commiſſion, fully to enquire and inform themſelves of the truth and reality of theſe offences, viz. ſorceries, engroſſings, &c. on the oaths of good and lawful men.

Fortunately for the reputed witches, they have not now ſo much to fear from the laws as the reputed engroſſers; for where there can be any pretence for perſecution, there will always be found ſome perſons of pernicious principles, who will promote baſe intereſts by popular deluſions.

The arts of rhetoric were a few years ago employed againſt witches, in charges from juſtices of the peace to juries, which, upon the compariſon, may be found to vie, in decency of language and minuteneſs of deſcription, with the celebrated charge concerning foreſtallers and engroſſers, which was delivered to the grand jury of Weſtminſter by Sir John Fielding. One would think this zealous magiſtrate had imbibed a portion of the ſame ſpirit that actuated that Solomon of his age, king James I.* who "moved, "(as he tells us) by the fearful abounding, at "this time in this country, of thoſe deteſtable "ſlaves of the devil, the witches or enchanters, "diſpatched in poſt his treatiſe of Deomonologie;" in the concluſion whereof, he gives it as his opinion, that "Since in a matter of trea-"ſon againſt the prince, bairnes or wives, or "never ſo diffamed perſons, may ſerve for ſuffi-"cient witneſſes; by a far greater reaſon ſuch "witneſſes may be ſufficient in matters of high-"treaſon againſt God:" adding beſides, "That "there are two other good helps that may be "uſed for their trial: the one is the finding of "their mark, and the trying the inſenſibility "thereof; the other is their floating on the wa-"ter; for it appears, that God hath appointed "(for a ſupernatural ſign of the monſtrous im-"piety of witches) that the water ſhall refuſe to "receive

* Works Folio, p. 91, 135 and 136.

" receive them in her boſome, that have ſhaken
" off them the ſacred water of baptiſme."

Thus to a fictitious crime is added the moſt doubtful, equivocal, infamous kind of proof: nevertheleſs, in the firſt year of his reign, an act paſſed to puniſh the offence with death; and the people, ſtimulated by the royal example, and that of the two houſes of parliament, were ſo buſy in detecting it, that many an old woman,

" Some only for not being drown'd,
" Others for ſitting above ground,
" Whole days and nights upon their breeches,
" And feeling pain, were hang'd for witches."

HUDIBRAS.

'Tis to be hoped that the zeal at preſent ſtirred up againſt Sir J.——F.——'s monſter, (after the firſt ſurprize is over) will be more according to knowledge.

This eminent and public-ſpirited juſtice of the peace ſeems to ground his opinion on ſomething more than meer ſuſpicion, concerning " the " great number of foreſtallers, &c. who, he " ſays, are a diſgrace to human nature, and a " diſhonour to a chriſtian country;" he acknowledges that " the monſters have ſeldom " been expoſed to open view." He is one of the firſt champions that have opened the hunt after them, and ſpeaks as if he was as expert in the ways of purſuit, and knew their haunts as well as thoſe of the young bucks and old bawds of the Garden; ſome people may imagine that by the deſcription, ſo exactly correſpondent to their own ideas, he has really caught ſome of them for very ſtrange and ſurpriſing animals: he paints them as " monſters in human ſhape, " and objects ſhocking to human ſight; they col-

" lect together the common neceſſaries of life, " the better to counteract the benevolence of " Providence, and to grind the face of the poor, " by making an artificial ſcarcity: their crime " is of the deepeſt dye, and an inſult to God;" nay, ſo exceedingly horrible and tremendous are theſe creatures, that, according to the experiences, or the opinion of this gentleman, their powers exceed thoſe of inchantment; for " by their arts and avarice they occaſion exorbi- " tant prices, after as plentiful harveſts and " abundant paſture, as ever have been remem- " bred;" they are to be deteſted as " much as " blaſphemers, incendiaries, and murderers; and " therefore he hopes the legiſlature will facili- " tate the proſecution of them."

After ſuch deſcriptions of the characters and of the crimes of foreſtallers, regrators, and engroſſers, can it be wondered at, that the common people have been ſtirred up to extirpate them?

Thoſe who are ſufferers by the mob, yet whoſe lives are ſpared, have reaſon (conſidering this deſcription of crimes charged upon them) to be thankful they have excited that mercy.

I will not ſay, on this occaſion, that the people were induſtriouſly frighted with phantoms, by thoſe whoſe buſineſs it was to allay their fears; but I will venture to remark, that there has been ſomething very unaccountable in the ſpeeches and actions of ſome principal men, from whoſe knowledge and experience in buſineſs, a different conduct might have been expected; for I would not willingly ſuſpect that they deſired to pay court to the vulgar, or multiply their friends into a mob, by ill-timed conceſſions and ill-adviſed compliances.

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The abilities and integrity of the great men, into whoſe hands the care of the nation is committed, has been ſo often proved, that we cannot ſuſpect them of a deſign to facilitate any baſe project againſt the trade of this country, how much ſoever it may ſeem that the firſt and greateſt outcries againſt the dealers in proviſions, have been made by thoſe who appear to be under miniſterial influence.

The miniſters at this preſent time cannot be chargeable with ſetting an example of ſevere expreſſions in public acts of ſtate, as in the inſtance of the proclamation againſt foreſtallers, engroſſers, &c. in the reign of the late king, (Nov. 1756) wherein they are deſcribed as open oppreſſors of the poor, and enemies of their country.

It is natural even to the greateſt men, and oftentimes very commendable, to court applauſe, by purſuing popular meaſures, in order to conciliate the eſteem of the people; for 'tis a very diſagreeable taſk to make alterations even for the better, in times of public diſcontent; therefore wiſe miniſters always take care not to excite prejudices againſt a claſs of men who are under the protection of laws, becauſe it is always dangerous to give ſuch a ſanction to the outrages which people who are at variance commit againſt each other; for if it ſhould happen that, beſides ſuch variance, there ſhould be among them a ſtruggle for bread, and party-rage ſhould be heightened by hunger, the moſt dreadful conſequences might enſue.

We are therefore to ſuppoſe that the great men who were at the helm ſome time ago, had the moſt exact intelligence of the effects which the rains, the floods and inundations had pro-

duced on the land; when the authority of a proclamation, by command of his preſent majeſty, determined great numbers of people to impute ſcarcity, not to unkindly ſeaſons, but to artifices of men. We are further to conſider that thoſe people who were determined in their opinions, by that authority, might judge too haſtily; for it is only expreſſed, that there was the greateſt reaſon to "ſuſpect that the preſent high prices "of proviſions do not ariſe from ſcarcity, but "from unlawful combinations;—and, in order "to prevent all unlawful combinations for the "inhancing the price of proviſions, and for an "encouragement to all who ſhall diſcover any "concerned in ſuch illegal practices, all perſons "who ſhall ſo diſcover and cauſe ſuch offend-"ers to be convicted, ſhall be entitled to a re-"ward of one hundred pounds."

Benevolence to mankind in general, and compaſſion to the injured, are the virtues of exalted minds; and every one who has the diſtreſſes of the poor at heart, will commend ſuch means as theſe, if they are found to ſilence the tumultuous cries of the people for bread; but if, after all, ſuch methods ſhould prove inadequate to the grievance, and the offer of ſuch a reward ſhould not bring offenders to juſtice; what will be thought of it? How will the people determine on the queſtion, whether the combinations are ſo artfully and ſecretly entered into, as to evade all the power of laws, and all the vigilance of magiſtrates? or are ſuch illegal combinations utterly impracticable, in the manner trade is now carried on?—People of different diſpoſitions and capacities will differ in their determinations on theſe points; and, as is uſual, great numbers will adhere to their firſt received opinions, aſſert

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the poſſibility of ſuch combinations, and call out for ſevere laws to ſuppreſs them.

It is indeed acknowledged on all hands, and experience ſhews, that no laws which were enacted againſt theſe combinations will anſwer the end for which they were intended; and it is confidently aſſerted by ſome of the beſt writers, that 'tis not in the power of laws to regulate the markets of the fruits and productions of the earth: If therefore, upon examination it ſhould appear that the latter opinion is founded in reaſon and truth, it muſt be allowed to be extremely hard upon a ſet of uſeful (not to ſay neceſſary) people, to be ſtigmatized as guilty of oppreſſion, extortion, and the moſt atrocious crimes:—People who may poſſibly be able to make it appear they are only gaining an honeſt livelihood by fair trade, and are entitled to the public countenance and protection.

But tho' many people are ſenſible of the inefficacy of theſe old ſtatutes, yet they deſire to have them revived from their dormant ſtate, to be hung over the heads of reputed foreſtallers in terrorem, on extraordinary occaſions, or elſewiſh them reviv'd, perhaps to remove the odium of miſ-management from the magiſtrates to the traders. But if equitable rules of government are of uſe to ſociety, why ſhould not every good government adhere to ſuch rules? —If the grievances which are complained of are real, they ſhould be removed, if 'tis within the power of laws to do it: but the laws ſhould be ſuch as are explicite and clear, for all people would willingly know preciſely wherein they may become tranſgreſſors.

A thorough reformation of all the ſtatutes relating to theſe ſubjects, will perhaps meet with

abundance of oppoſition, eſpecially among people who are bigotted to old cuſtoms and long received opinions; and, if we may collect the ſenſe of ſome of our ſuperiors * from ſome recent tranſactions, we have reaſon to fear that the freedom of trade, particularly of theſe branches, will be rather abridged than enlarged; for many curious plans have been propoſed and recommended to the attention of the legiſlature, and inſtructions have been preſented to particular members of parliament by their conſtituents, which exhibit a variety of ſchemes to reſtrain farmers and dealers from getting poſſeſſion of too much land and too much merchandize.—— Schemes that promote the tolls of markets and fairs, and keep our good victuals at home for our own eating,——and ſchemes which in the opinion of many projectors of them, will promote the general good; but in this particular they ſeem all to agree that 'tis in the power of parliament to produce a plenty, and to apply remedies to all the grievances.

The wiſdom of government, in its legiſlative capacity, and its widely-extended views, will undoubtedly ſtrike out better plans than 'tis in the power of private perſons to form; and we are to regard its deciſions with decency and reſpect: yet from the notices we have had, and the cauſes of fear for our moſt important intereſts, it is certainly incumbent on us, to have a jealous and watchful

* Does not the ſelling wheat and flour at prices below the intrinſic value, by ſome of the greateſt men in the nation, imply they entertain a notion that prices on commodities may be fixed by laws? They would not ſurely do theſe things merely to gain popular reputation.

watchful eye over the rights of trade and commerce. It is not the owners of and traders in proviſion only, that are intereſted herein; it is the buſineſs of every freeholder and trader, and indeed of every Briton, to guard theſe privileges from violation and encroachment; our liberty and properties are included in them; and we ſhould therefore turn our attention to every thing that will preſerve to us and to our poſterity, theſe inexpreſſible bleſſings.

The liberty of writing and ſpeaking freely, fully, and impartially, is a part of the rights of every freeborn Briton: thoſe who have ſuffered injuries have a right to complain, whether injured by partial and ſevere laws, or by the partial adminiſtration of them; and if they apprehend any danger, that through inadvertency, or miſinformation, injurious laws will be framed and carried into execution, they may beg leave to recommend one caution, even to legiſlators; and that is, always to have in their thoughts, that to a free and equitable conſtitution of government, there is no ſeaſon ſo dangerous as the time of popular clamour, for the redreſs of grievances: at ſuch a time, when men are heated with too much zeal, they are induced to make conceſſions, and wink at incroachments, which may end in the loſs of ſome valuable privileges to every member of the community.

The preſent criſis is (if ever there was one) a period of popular clamour. The owners of food, neceſſary to our ſubſiſtence, are repreſented as the moſt pernicious enemies to ſociety.—A Corniſh tinner,* in a public paper; "deſires to kindle

* London Chronicle, Sept. 23, p. 293.

" dle in the breaſts of exalted ſpirits, ſuch a " flame, as ſhall, like the blaſts of heaven, con- " found theſe authors of public calamities, and " all thoſe who ſhall abet and ſupport them." —nay, to ſuch a length has this ſingular ſpecies of perſecution been raiſed, that ſeemingly good men have wiſhed to cruſh them, by the interpoſition of government.

An hundred inſtances could be produced to ſhew, that not the common people only, but many in ſuperior ſtations, have exclaimed againſt them, even to execration; and diffuſed ſuch notions, concerning all owners of, and traders in proviſion, as have a tendency to the ſubverſion of all order and good ſociety.

It is not then to be wondered at, that ſome, among the common people, have been ſtirred up, to the exerciſe of ſuch enormities as were unknown in former times, when the neceſſaries of life have been dearer.

This Banditti, under the pretence of their grievances, have broke looſe upon us, to puniſh our perſons, and to plunder our properties. Such injuries, oppreſſions, and cruelties were perpetrated by ſome of them, as are ſcarcely credible; all order was deſtroyed by theſe regulating mobs; confuſion took place; they ſeized our effects, as of right; entered our houſes by violence, and threatened to drag to death, thoſe who ſhould dare to reſiſt them.

Theſe free-booters were not meagre half-ſtarved people, nor did they appear to be in want of any of the neceſſaries of life; they were encouraged by great numbers of turbulent diſpoſition, in affluent circumſtances, who, at length, began to be in danger of being preyed upon in the ſame manner.——No one can tell what may be

be the conſequence of an inflamed rabble's attempting the redreſs of pretended grievances; for when riotous and diſorderly people are collected together, and have done one act of violence, they ſoon proceed to another.

To guard againſt ſuch inſurrections for the future, 'tis of the utmoſt importance, that proper methods be taken for keeping the lower ranks of people under due ſubordination.

Our great men and rulers have ſuperior judgment to thoſe who are not neceſſarily employed on ſuch important objects as the intereſt of the ſtate; on them we may rely for the ſecurity of every thing that we have a legal claim to; and may hope that the defects in our laws, will be remedied; for to thoſe defects, to the inattention of government, and to the miſtaken opinions which have prevailed among all ranks of men amongſt us, we may fairly attribute a great deal of the miſmanagement, which, for ſome years paſt, has been ſtirring up the levelling principles of the loweſt people, to enthuſiaſtic rage and fury. We may rely on the experience, the acuteneſs, and the integrity of thoſe great men, that they will likewiſe pay attention to that very important point, the ſupply of neceſſaries on fair and equitable terms. This is all that can be deſired, and hereon a great deal depends;—for commercial and manufacturing ſtates muſt have their eyes on the prices of proviſions, among their neighbours, if they expect their goods to find a vent at foreign markets; which cannot be, unleſs they provide both for cheapneſs of neceſſaries and cheapneſs of labour at home.—No people can deprive us of our trade, unleſs they are more induſtrious or more temperate than ourſelves. We ſell proviſions to foreign manufacturers,

therefore they cannot, in general, be fed much cheaper than ourſelves; except the better kinds of proviſions are reckoned neceſſaries here, and luxuries among them.

Let us preſerve amongſt ourſelves the virtues of good citizens, and we ſhall be able to obtain improvements, in the internal trade, and civil policy of Great-Britain, by means of our already excellent conſtitution, and under the guardianſhip of our moſt auſpicious king.

Our extenſive foreign trade is the admiration and envy of every power on earth; and we may reaſonably hope, that the more enlarged rules of commerce will be made to prevail in our inland traffic; as it is found, by experience, that nothing encourages agriculture, and promotes plenty, ſo much as the utmoſt freedom in the trade of corn and every other article of common conſumption; and that every reſtraint on theſe branches of commerce checks the ſupply of proviſions.

Let every one do his utmoſt, to procure internal peace and tranquility, to promote trade, agriculture, and manufactures; we have then every real ſource of proſperity, we may enjoy happineſs, and ſhall experience thoſe attendants on good government, the increaſe of people, and aſcendency in the world.

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FINIS.

ERRATA.

Page 8, line 23. for *that* read *the*; p. 16, l. 32, read *did bear*; p. 17, l. 15, for 100 read 400; p. 20, laſt note, for *mills* read *millions*; p. 24, l. 2, for *prohibitive* read *prohibition*; p. 25, l. ult. read *their duties to*; p. 32, l. 28, for *ſingle* read *younger*.